

Gulf Coast Prairie Landscape Conservation Cooperative

Purpose

The Gulf Coast Prairie region faces many challenges that threaten both nature and wildlife within this diverse landscape. The once extensive grassland system has been impacted by urban and agricultural development. Large river systems struggle to maintain watershed integrity and base flows. Coastal systems fight the effects of reduced freshwater inputs. Unprecedented drought, catastrophic wildfires, and climate-related impacts, as well as other threats such as pollution, invasive species, and disease also put a strain on native species and habitats.

Recognizing that the ecological restoration and preservation of this region is vital for the sustainability of a variety of species, the cooperative partnership led by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is working with other government and non-government conservation partners to further develop the Gulf Coast Prairie Landscape Conservation Cooperative (GCP LCC). This cooperative partnership is committed to conserving fish, wildlife, and their habitats throughout this area.

The GCP LCC consists of partnerships based on science, and brings information to on-the-ground strategic conservation efforts. The GCP LCC offers leadership to strengthen the effectiveness of conservation of wildlife populations and their habitats throughout the region by providing the best available scientific information to inform management decisions. It will achieve this collaborative vision through shared access to science, data, expertise, and resources.

Geography

From tall grass prairies to forested landscapes, across tidal flats and reef complexes, the Gulf Coast Prairie region boasts a beautiful and incredibly complex landscape. The area encompasses portions of five states (Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Kansas), three Service regions (two, four, and six), and four terrestrial ecoregions (Oaks and Prairies, Gulf Coast Prairie, Tamaulipan Brushlands, and Edwards Plateau). Eventually, it is envisioned to include portions of three Mexican



Coastal freshwater marsh habitat in southwestern Louisiana.
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states that share similar habitats (Tamaulipas, Nuevo Leon, and Coahuila). The Gulf Coast Prairie region contains several large river systems, including the lower Rio Grande, Guadalupe, Brazos, Trinity, Nueces, Arkansas, Red, San Antonio, and Mississippi Rivers. Each subdivision contains a unique mix of habitats and priority populations of fish and wildlife.





Tamaulipan scrub habitat. USFWS photograph

Habitats and Species

An array of wildlife, including endangered species such as the Attwater's prairie chicken, make their home in the Gulf Coast Prairie region. More than 300 butterfly species and 500 bird species can be found here, including the interior least tern, aplomado falcon, and black-capped vireo. Brush habitats form the northeast range of the elusive endangered ocelot. The region also harbors a number of native plant species, including endangered Texas ayenia, South Texas ambrosia, star cactus, Walker's manioc, ashy dogweed, and Zapata bladderpod.

Partnerships

The GCP LCC is part of a seamless international network of partners who are focused on helping maintain landscapes capable of sustaining abundant, diverse and healthy populations of fish, wildlife and plants. The GCP LCC will serve to accomplish conservation objectives that no single agency or organization could accomplish alone.

Key organizations involved in the GCP LCC partnership include the Service, the U.S. Geological Survey, National Park Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Department of Commerce (NOAA), Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation, The Conservation Fund, Ducks Unlimited, and The Nature Conservancy. The existing conservation network includes three Joint Venture partnerships (Gulf Coast Joint Venture, Rio Grande Joint Venture, Oaks and Prairies Joint Venture), the Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership, and the Reservoir Fisheries Partnership.

The GCP LCC has also expanded its capacity through close working relationships and cooperative agreements with Texas A&M University and The Wildlife Management Institute. Over time, other forums within the cooperative will be developed to encourage further participation by the broader conservation community.

Climate Science Center

The recently announced South Central Climate Science Center (SD CSC), hosted by Oklahoma University (and University partners like Oklahoma State, Texas Tech, Louisiana State, Louisiana Lafayette), will greatly expand science capacity within this cooperative partnership. Associated within this partnership will be the USGS-led development of landscape climate science.

Looking to the Future

Based on preliminary assessments of skills needed to support full implementation of the GCP LCC, the Service will work with the partnership to build capacity in landscape ecology and modeling, monitoring and statistics, and GIS and information management.

Depending on the GCP LCC Steering Committee's priorities, objectives, operational needs, and funding, the partners may request additional staff to coordinate science and provide additional expertise in data analysis, aquatic and terrestrial ecology, communications, social science, decision analysis, and conservation genetics, among other areas.

Through the efforts of the GCP LCC, the Service and its partners will help to fulfill their shared mission to protect and conserve nature and wildlife in this unique and important landscape for future generations of Americans.

Timeline

In FY 2010, an Interagency Advisory Team was convened to assist with compiling a Draft Development and Operations Plan. The Draft Plan was revised in FY 2011 by the newly formed GCP LCC Steering Committee, and seven (7) priority science needs were funded. These science-based efforts will be the foundation for work to begin priority biological planning and conservation design projects and climate adaptation strategy for this geographic area.

For Further Information, Contact

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Results of prescribed fire: Oaks and Prairie habitat, north-central Texas. Bill Bartush / USFWS